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INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0003
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0113
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBAI 000570

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/30/2017

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SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES TRAFFICKING CONCERNS IN DUBAI -- ABUSED VISITOR
VISAS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Paul Sutphin, CG, Executive, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (d)

DEPARTMENT FOR G/TIP, INL, DRL, NEA/RA, AND NEA/ARP, L/DL

¶1. (C) Summary: In separate meetings with Philippine Labor Attache Virginia Calvez (September 11), Acting Consul General Maria Louella Duarte and Consular Officer Rafael Palencia, Jr. (September 18), Pol/EconOff discussed trafficking in persons concerns. While they claim that trafficking with labor visas is limited, the UAE visitor visa process is reportedly wide-open to abuse by traffickers and labor exploiters. Despite a relatively low estimated number of Filipinas sex-trafficked into Dubai, Consulate officials here are frustrated at the lack of prosecutions of traffickers in both the Philippines and the UAE. End Summary.

Type of visa matters

¶2. (SBU) According to Labor Attache Duarte, more stringent labor contract review and tighter visa procedures by Manila have effectively eliminated trafficking of Filipinos into the UAE on labor visas. However, she cautioned, traffickers take advantage of a relatively "lax" UAE visitor visa process and bring women into the country on 60 day visit visas. Consular Officer Palencia added his estimate that well over 500 Filipinos enter the UAE on visitors visas daily (via 9 daily flights between Manila and Dubai).

¶3. (C) Ridiculing the current UAE visitor visa, Palencia showed Pol/EconOff photocopies of visas showing the applicant's occupation as "business person," cynically noting that "every visitor visa issued says occupation business person. How many of these are really business people?" He said the UAEG is notoriously lax in its visitor policy; applicants are not required to appear for personal interviews or additional background checks. (Comment: If true, this policy is an open door to Filipinos job seekers without previously-arranged contracts. End comment.) Renewals of visas after 60 days are relatively easy to get. Applicants simply exit the country, Kish Island, Iran is a common destination, and wait for their new visa approval documents to be faxed to them. When the "system" works, Filipinos (and others) can return to the UAE the same day with a brand new 60 day visitors visa (when it does not work, they end up stranded in Kish without the funds to return to the Philippines or a visa to enter another country). When

queried as to whether a tightening of visa requirements by the UAEG would serve as an effective deterrent to traffickers and labor exploiters, Palencia nodded, but countered that the UAEG has no incentive to revise a policy that generates substantial governmental revenue (he estimated the UAEG issues 12,000 to 20,000 visit visas a day with fees starting at 750 AED [205 USD] each). (Comment: Post has no data to confirm these numbers, but does not find visas fee income a compelling reason for the wealthy UAE to admit visitors who may overstay their welcome. End comment.)

Low rate of trafficking repatriation

14. (C) Over the past two and a half years, Palencia's office has repatriated approximately fifty trafficked women with similar experiences -- poor rural girls approached by recruiters and offered a "good" job and free airline ticket to Dubai. Recruiters forward the women's pictures and passport details to Filipino contacts in Dubai who work with local travel agents to secure the standard sixty day visit visa. Once approved, either the travel agency or the Dubai contact fax a copy of the visa approval to the applicant. With a passport, visa approval and ticket in hand, the Philippine government does not restrict a woman's right to travel; nonetheless, Palencia expressed frustration that every time his government considers restricting travel rights of young women in order to prevent trafficking, there is a strident public outcry about citizen's rights to travel anywhere they chose.

15. (SBU) Upon landing in Dubai, the girls are reportedly met by "mama-sans"/"mother hens" (i.e., brothel owners) and transported directly to their accommodations. There, their passports are confiscated and they are finally told what their new "job" will be. According to Palencia, the girls are informed that they owe the organization 15,000 AED (roughly 4,090 USD) and that a portion of their set "session fee" of 300 AED (approximately 82

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USD) will be applied towards paying down the "debt". Once the debt is eliminated, the girls are told, their passports will be returned and they will be "released".

16. (C) In an aside, Palencia suggested that approximately 80% of the girls who are trafficked to Dubai are, in fact, aware that they will be working as prostitutes. However, they apparently aren't aware that their passports will be withheld and that they will, effectively, be held prisoner while working off an unanticipated debt. When asked how many Filipinas are now working in the sex industry in Dubai, Palencia estimated eighty women.

Need to jail trafficking perpetrators

17. (C) Expressing frustration over the lack of arrests and prosecutions of traffickers both in the Philippines and the UAE, Palencia complained that not only does the UAE Criminal Investigation Department (CID) fail to take substantive action against identified traffickers, but once back in the Philippines, the trafficking victims refuse to cooperate with authorities in identifying and prosecuting local recruiters. Palencia's primary complaint against the UAE CID is its apparent lack of interest in pursuing investigations of Dubai-based brothel owners; he stated that Emirate officials seem to think the case ends once the girl is returned to her country and they do not "go after" the racketeers. He speculated "if just one case" was brought to trial and sentenced, it would dissuade many perpetrators from continuing in the trade.

New twist: re-trafficked to Kabul

18. (C) Acting Consul General Duarte added yet another twist to the trafficking saga, noting that recently the Philippine Ambassador to Islamabad (who also covers Afghanistan) has been involved in a case involving women and men "trans-trafficked" through Dubai onto Kabul. Apparently, once trafficked to Dubai, the victims had been shipped onward to Afghanistan, where they have little hope of escaping an unanticipated and difficult plight. She asked if the USG has additional information on this new phenomenon.

Comment

9 (C) While Dubai prides itself as a tourist destination and a relaxed bastion in a relatively conservative region, we should encourage the UAE to review any visitor visa regulations that might be exploited by traffickers. We don't want to dissuade legitimate tourism, yet a more cautious visitor visa policy (especially as it applies to low-income, developing country nationals) might act as a deterrent to trafficking in persons and illegal labor recruitment. We will raise this issue with contacts in the UAE Anti-TIP committee. End comment.
SUTPHIN